

1999

Brief Notice

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/ssl>

 Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

(1999) "Brief Notice," *Studies in Scottish Literature*: Vol. 31: Iss. 1.
Available at: <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/ssl/vol31/iss1/23>

This Brief Notice is brought to you by the Scottish Literature Collections at Scholar Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Studies in Scottish Literature* by an authorized editor of Scholar Commons. For more information, please contact dillarda@mailbox.sc.edu.

Brief Notices

Moira Burgess. *Imagine a City: Glasgow in Fiction*. Foreword by Douglas Gifford. Glendaruel, Argyll: Argyll Publishing. 1998. 351 pp. ISBN:1-874640-78-5.

This is an important book. Moira Burgess has made a study of the Glasgow novel her speciality for some time, her bibliography on the subject being already a standard source of reference. Now, she follows this up with a full-length study, ranging from almost forgotten late eighteenth-century novels through Scott's *Rob Roy* to the present so-called Glasgow School of Gray, Kelman and Galloway.

She effectively begins her survey in detail with *Rob Roy*; with its broad picture of commerce early in the nineteenth century, rather than with the more or less contemporary *The Youth and Manhood of Cyril Thornton* by Thomas Hamilton, which portrays an even more vivid picture of the commercial city a few years earlier, but which novel she merely mentions in a footnote. Incidentally, her system of not numbering collected footnotes, but of identifying them by a repeated part-quote I found a little inconvenient. If I have one quibble over this excellent, well-researched and eminently readable book it is that I would have liked more detailed examination of such early fiction as Hamilton's *Cyril Thornton* and *Peter's Letters to His Kinsfolk* of Lockhart.

Burgess is excellent in her account of the "incomplete" portraits of city life favored by the Urban Kailyard writers (to quote the phrase she herself invented), with their concentration on only the polite aspects of Glasgow life;

fair, too, to the two novels that to many people will seem most readily to have portrayed Glasgow, though from different angles, to the outside world, MacArthur's *No Mean City* and Guy McCrone's *Wax Fruit*, both still remarkably sustained best-sellers.

She is, perhaps, at her best, however, in dealing with the various attempts of novelists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries to come to terms with proletarian Glasgow, the most widely-read example as well as one of the earliest being George Blake's *The Shipbuilders*.

Burgess writes enthusiastically and extensively of Alasdair Gray's *Lanark* as the most influential Glasgow novel of modern times, obviously not sharing my own inability to believe in so many of Gray's characters, which often seem to reflect something of the lineaments of the author's own personality (much as does the talk of the respective "heroes" in William McIlvaney's excellent *Docherty* and *Laidlaw*, the voice of the cleverer author sometimes sounding through the character-speech). Rightly, however, she values the novels of both these talented men highly for their much more important achievements in realistic portrayal.

Burgess is most perceptive when writing of James Kelman, the writer of proletarian Glasgow who speaks with its wholly authentic voice and never misses a nuance. He has come nearer than any other writer to depicting to a wider readership the lives and language of the underprivileged in an industrial city, and has justly achieved a wider readership since his award of the Booker Prize. She also gives a very fair assessment of the tales by his young "disciple," Janice Galloway, and that other no less talented Glasgow-loving woman fiction writer, A. L. Kennedy, whose *So I Am Glad* (1995) seems to me one of the most unforgettable of all Glasgow novels, and which prompts Burgess's comment that with it, "magic realism has arrived in the Glasgow novel."

The recurring problems about virtually all pre-Kelman proletarian fiction is that its writers, by the very act of writing, have almost always removed themselves for their original social ambience. The problem of the long-anticipated, but not yet realized, "great Glasgow novel" is that no one, even now, seems quite sure what, in this context, "great" means, or for that matter, "Glasgow."

Imagine a City: Glasgow in Fiction should prove absorbing to anyone interested in the changing social moves of the city over the past two centuries. It is also that rare double achievement: a scholarly study certain to be indispensable to all serious students of Scottish Literature for many years to come.

MAURICE LINDSAY

Helen McCorry, ed. *The Thistle at War: An Anthology of the Scottish Experience of War, in the Services and at Home*. Edinburgh: National Museums of Scotland. 1997. 128 pp.

For reasons which are well known, Scotland has contributed a disproportionately large number of soldiers in fighting the wars and keeping the peace abroad and at home in Great Britain. England so outnumbered the Scots that before the Union it was necessary for the smaller nation to draw more heavily upon her inhabitants to fight the wars which divided the two countries. What more natural than that the literature, music and graphic arts should echo this martial preoccupation?

Helen McCorry has drawn extensively upon the resources of the National Museums of Scotland to produce a most satisfying book, with numerous well chosen illustrations, many of them in color. Following a short Introduction by Eric Lomax, there are seven sections to the collection: "Scots and Scottishness," uniforms, recruitment, daily life, the battlefield, "Death and Mourning," and peace. Most of the selections are less than a page in length, made up of a judicious mixture of memoirs and historical writings, a few excerpts from works of fiction, and a goodly number of poems. George MacDonald Fraser, on the topic of Scottishness, writes, "being a Scot, it was half expected of me that I would be a wild man, a head case." By no means every Scot even knew precisely what he was fighting for, as William Soutar pointed out:

Hal o' the Wynd he taen the field
 Alang be the skinklin Tay:
 And he hackit doun the men o' Chattan;
 Or was it the men o' Kay?

We all know that life was hard for the enlisted man: flogging was common, even for trivial offenses; in Perth in 1776 members of the Black Watch could be sentenced to from 100 to 500 lashes a day for several days. In 1911 the daily ration was "one soldier, one sausage." There is also an account of de-lousing in World War I, an event much looked forward to by the troops.

Accounts of Scottish garb go back to Culloden, including a piece by Alan Cameron, Colonel of the Cameron Highlanders, extolling the benefits of the kilt for his troops, written in 1804. There is a delightful colored print of Scottish soldiers in Paris after Waterloo, subtitled "La Curiosité des Femmes" showing a young woman trying to get a peek under a kilt.

The section devoted to the Scots in battle is the most representative, opening with a selection from "Bruce's Address to his Bannockburn Army" from the fourteenth-century poem by John Barbour. An NCO of the Fraser Highlanders writes of the Battle of the Plains of Abraham at the taking of Quebec in 1759, lamenting the death of General James Wolfe, beloved of High-

landers because the story had gotten around that he refused an order to execute wounded rebels on the moor of Culloden. Wolfe shared the dubious honor with General Louis Montcalm of leading the last major battle in which both commanders were killed.

An interesting excerpt from a book by A. F. Corbet recounts an experience when set upon by a 6'4" Dervish in Omdurman (across the Nile from Khartoum) in 1898; even more spectacular is the length of time the author spent in the army, which we learn from the title: *Service Through Six Reigns: 1891 to 1953!*

In this day, when folk remedies are making a tentative comeback, it is instructive to read an account of gathering sphagnum moss in Scotland for use as field dressings during World War I; this method of treating wounds was still in use by country people after WW II. There are poems about both World Wars—the little-known “On the Somme” (in Gaelic and English) by Dòmhnall Dòmhnallach, and the well-known “51st Highland Division’s Farewell to Sicily” by Hamish Henderson.

As might be expected, some of the best-known poems are to be found in the section entitled “The Flowers of the Forest” which includes Jean Elliott’s haunting poem of that title. The traditional “Highland Widow’s Lament” tells how the widow’s man had followed when “Charlie he cam ower at last, / Sae far, tae set us free” to end with her keening:

Ochone, ochone, O Donald O,
Ochone, ochone, ochrie,
Nae woman in this whole warld wide
Sae wretched now as me.

John McCrae’s “In Flanders Fields” is doubtless the best-known poem in this section, if not the entire book, but the editor judiciously balances patriotic verse with selections which question the cost, as does Sydney Goodsir Smith’s “The Mither’s Lament” which concludes:

Doutless he deed for Scotland’s life;
Doutless the statesman dinna lee;
But och tis sair begrutten pride
And wersh the wine o victorie!

Helen McCorry has put together an excellent celebration of the Scottish soldier, the poetry and prose unfailingly interesting and instructive, while the illustrations substantially enrich this delightful book.

ALEXANDER FRASER

Margaret Glen, compiler. *A Bibliography of the Works of Duncan Glen: Author, Editor and Publisher*. Kirkcaldy: Akros Publications. 1998. 32 pp.

For as long as most readers can recall the name of Duncan Glen has been associated with that of Hugh MacDiarmid, so it came as no surprise to me to see that Glen's earliest publication was entitled *Christopher Murray Grieve: Hugh MacDiarmid Rebel Poet and Prophet. A Short Note on the Occasion of his Seventieth Birthday* which appeared in 1962. In that same year Kulgin Duval and Sydney Goodsir Smith edited *Hugh MacDiarmid: A Festschrift*; these were the first two books devoted to Grieve, if one excepts MacDiarmid's own pseudonymous *The Politics and Poetry of Hugh MacDiarmid* by "Arthur Leslie." It is perhaps not too much to say that while MacDiarmid had been known and admired since the 1920s the *Festschrift* and Duncan Glen's later work on the poet made him known in a world context.

Two years later Glen edited *Hugh MacDiarmid (Christopher Murray Grieve) and the Scottish Renaissance*, a work which appeared under the imprint of W. & R. Chambers, thus ensuring the book of a wide distribution. There followed editions of MacDiarmid's works, critical and biographical essays on the poet and a collection of 437 photographs, limited to 55 copies in 1969, but reissued in 1970. Unfortunately for the broader world of scholars and collectors, Glen issued several of his works in extremely limited printings, sometimes as few as twenty-five copies.

In 1965 Glen founded and published Akros and it was soon joined by Akros Publications. Over the years this imprint has produced major works by J. K. Annand, George Bruce, Maurice Lindsay, Edwin Morgan, Alexander Scott, Tom Scott, and Iain Crichton Smith, to name but a few. As may be seen from the book under review, the Akros imprint remains active a third of a century later.

Nothing has been said about Duncan Glen as poet. Like his mentor MacDiarmid, Glen uses pseudonyms for his own work—three of the earliest four entries by him in this bibliography appeared under other names. Although his editorial and critical efforts tend to overshadow his poetry, Glen remains active in the creative field—Akros Publications produced his *Seventeen Poems* in 1997 and *Selected New Poems* in 1998.

In addition to his considerable involvement in writing, editing and publishing, Duncan Glen spent many years teaching graphic design at Preston and was later Head of the Department of Visual Communication at Nottingham-Trent University. His wife Margaret has compiled a useful bibliography of this quite remarkable man.

Tom Hubbard. *Seeking Mr. Hyde: Studies in Robert Louis Stevenson, Symbolism, Myth and the Pre-Modern*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang. 1995. 116 pp. Scottish Studies 18.

There can be little doubt that Stevenson's reputation has, for too long, been left largely in the hands of the biographers. This is hardly surprising; the events of the author's life are the stuff of good narratives, the very subject matter that is likely to sell books. Ironically, the reputations of the author's own books have suffered for the same reason that his biographies have propagated. Burdened by the stigma of popularity—however undeserved that stigma may be in the light of the unevenness with which his texts were received by the contemporary reading public—Stevenson has been allowed to slip from the canon (if he was ever truly part of it) by an academy that is still essentially Leavisite in its values. It would seem that a writer of boy's adventure stories has no place among the likes of Dickens, Eliot, and Hardy.

Tom Hubbard's book is, in part, an attempt to rectify that situation. Relating Stevenson to "the supra-rational and counter-establishment discourse of late nineteenth-century French and European Symbolism," Hubbard argues that Stevenson's works occupy a transitional space between modernist radicalism and Victorian conservatism. Indeed, Stevenson was, in a sense, stuck between two worlds, and the resulting conflict is evident in his constant mediation between the romantic tales of his youth and the realistic stories of his adulthood. Hubbard, though, rejects the traditional romance-realism dialectic of Stevenson studies—and rightly so, for it has largely outlived its usefulness—and instead throws himself into a reading of Stevenson as a proto-symbolist.

Not surprisingly, Hubbard chooses the *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, perhaps the least Stevensonian of Stevenson's major texts, as the key to his argument. Many of Stevenson's primary figures, Hubbard argues, exhibit the "hellish energy" that one sees in the Hyde aspect of the Jekyll-Hyde character. Long John Silver, Alan Breck Stewart, Prince Florizell, James Durie, and a host of characters are paraded out, made to bow to Bakhtin, and hurried on their way. They are all, Hubbard contends, examples of Stevenson's carnivalesque writing, characters that invert traditional hierarchies and often elicit a smile in the process. There is some validity to this reasoning, but one almost feels that this is G. Gregory Smith's "Caledonian antisyzygy" tailored for a modern audience. Like Smith, Bakhtin posits a cacophonous text that is constantly at odds with itself. With Stevenson's persistent use of the *doppelgänger* motif, such a reading seems self-evident.

The majority of Hubbard's book is less argumentative than it is speculative. His connections—between Stevenson and such disparate figures as Thomas Mann, Emile Verhaeren, Marcel Schwob, Dostoyevsky, Nietzsche, and Goethe to name but a few—are frequent but undeveloped. The links are often

intriguing, but each is soon abandoned in favor of the next. Hubbard would have us understand that that is intended, that his text is meant to be "a begetter of theses rather than a thesis itself." However, the fact that this effect is intentional does not make it any less distracting. By skipping from E. M. Forester to *Jekyll and Hyde* to the growth of socialism to *The Time Machine* in consecutive paragraphs, Hubbard does not so much enlighten as bewilder. His thread, when there is one, ties itself in knots, leaving readers to shake loose what kernels of insight they can. One can only conclude that Hubbard's book is successful at what it sets out to be: a hectic, underdeveloped, sporadically engaging wild ride through its author's free-associating mind.

JASON A. PIERCE

Andrew Martin, compiler. *Scottish Endings: Writings on Death*. Edinburgh: National Museums of Scotland. 1996. 128 pp.

Andrew Martin has chosen a most unusual topic for his compilation which is illustrated from materials in the National Museums of Scotland. The attitude toward death, among Scots as well as most other people, has altered, says James Robertson in his Introduction, since the days when men and women lived and died in their homes. Nowadays, though, death is "tidied away into hospitals and funeral parlours as if it were a bad-mannered intrusion." Death has changed, too, from the time not so long ago when barely half the children born reached a first birthday. Some causes of death are now rarely encountered, as we can see from the litany of such disasters chronicled in Donne's famous sonnet, "Death, be not proud." Nor are we likely anymore to agree with Burns's early poem "Man was Made to Mourn" in which we read, "O Death! the poor man's dearest friend, / The kindest and the best!" Death, as Turgenev put it, is an old joke which comes with new irony to every person.

By no means was death always treated as something to be dreaded. We find in this selection Cunninghame-Graham's famous "Beattock for Moffat" and Douglas Young's succinct "Last Lauch" wherein a minister tells the protagonist who was planting a tree that it would die, but the last lines give a different story:

It's grawan stark and heich,
Derk and strucht and sinister,
Kirkyairdielike and dreich.
But whaur's the Minister?

Burns could laugh at death also, as can be seen in "Tam o'Shanter," the Alloway Kirk portion of which is printed here, together with John Faed's illustration of Cutty-sark dancing. Scottish literature is well served with tales of diablerie: Stevenson's "Thrawn Janet" and an excerpt from Scott's *Letters on Demonology and Witchcraft* both make an appearance here, as does also the grave-opening sequence from Hogg's *Confessions of a Justified Sinner*. Among traditional beliefs we find this: "The person last buried had to keep watch over the graveyard till the next funeral came. This was called *Faire Chlaidh*, the graveyard watch, kept by the spirits of the departed."

We are told of a very different graveyard watch in the story of Greyfriars' Bobby, the faithful dog who kept watch over his master's grave, leaving his vigil daily when the gun at Edinburgh Castle sounded noon to go for a meal at a nearby dining room, whereupon he returned to the graveside. This true-life story has made Bobby one of the best know of all Scottish dogs.

The traditional ballads were, of course, filled with death: "The Dowie Houms o' Yarrow" (usually "The Dowie Dens o' Yarrow") and "The Two Corbies" appear in Martin's collection. The latter ballad is present in its Scottish form, a far cry from the English version ("The Three Ravens") in which a doe buries a slain knight and dies herself; the English ballad ends: "God send every gentleman,/ Such haukes, such hounds, and such a leman." Contrast this "tender little English ballad," as it has been called, with the starkness of the superior Scottish verses which conclude when one corbie tells the other:

Mony a one him maks mane,
But nane sall ken whar he is gane:
O'er his white banes, when they are bare,
The wind sall blaw for evermair.

The numerous illustrations, sometimes depicting events in the selections, at other times of a more general nature, greatly enhance the volume. One photograph shows several carved miniature wooden coffins with figures inside, discovered on Arthur's Seat in Edinburgh in 1836, but obviously carved at a much earlier date. A grisly reminder of an earlier time is the photograph of the mort collar which was "bolted through the bottom of the coffin and round the neck of the corpse, to prevent its theft by resurrectionists."

A fascinating look at what awaits all of us before we too step into the hereafter.

JOHN DAVIDSON